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ABSTRACT

The author examines specific manifestations of violence in relation to sexuality: (1) forcible rape rate; (2) war atrocities; (3) sexual violence in prisons; and (4) pornography. Drawing much from Hannah Arendt's book on violence, he views sexual violence as symptomatic of a lack of sexual power, not a sign of its possession. The causes are seen in the social and commercial pressures of society which leave men less room to act as distinct and separate individuals. The intrusion of violence into everyday life via the media stimulates men and increasingly serve to contaminate their interpersonal relationships and sexual lives, through which they seek to escape these pressures. A solution is offered: provide straightforward information, via comprehensive sex education, to counter the influence of media stimulation which links sex with violence. People would then be anabled to make informed choices about the way they will act sexually. (TL)

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SEXUALITY AND VIOLENCE

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by

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NATIONAL COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS: Annual Conference --
Plenary Session, Chicago, October 7, 1970

In this great city in the world's most powerful nation are assembled the leading professionals in the one area that affects the lives of us all -- the family. And we are to discuss Violence, an element increasingly present in this society. I wonder if you realize the extent to which the eyes of the world are turned upon you in this land as you search to find your Nation's soul? Not only the citizens of this country, but those of other nations, watched in fascination and alarm the events that took place within sight of the building in which we are now meeting, as the awesome spectacle of mass violence exploded here a little over two years ago.

I will address myself today to the relationship between sexuality and violence. This is not a pleasant subject. This paper has not been pleasant to write; it was unpleasant to research. It will not be pleasant to hear or to read.

I think I have found the task difficult because my background is not in the social sciences, but rather in the law, in administration, in writing and in the practice of marriage counseling and sex education.

First I must examine some of the specific manifestations of violence in relation to sexuality, and it may be best to begin some way from home. A few years ago there was a civil war in Colombia, South America. It was not described as a civil war, nor did it reach the headlines of the world's newspapers. Yet, when recently in

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Guatemala City, I was told by a Colombian physician of the excesses of violence that occurred in her country. The civil war, she told me, was both violent and cruel. Civil war is usually distinguished for its beastliness, and it is perhaps not surprising to hear that during the Colombian war many women were raped. But it was worse than this. In fact, a deliberate attempt was made by many of the combatants on both sides to destroy life and the means to reproduce life. I am told that the bellies of pregnant women were cut open and the foetus destroyed. Captured men were castrated, and many women after first being raped, were tortured by sticks and even weapons being forced into their vaginas. This appalling cruelty did not occur rarely or in isolation; it was systematic, and was abetted by many of those involved in the conflict.

One is forcibly reminded of the haunting etchings by the artist Goya of incidents in the Spanish Civil War, in which he depicted acts of sexual abuse and violence. Illustrations of acts of rape and sexual assault appear frequently, one especially disturbing scene depicting soldiers forcing women to submit to them under threat of castration of their husbands.

We cannot pretend to be so much more civilized that such sexual violence is absent from our own society. In this country there is a police report of one forcible rape every 17 minutes. Between 1960 and 1968 the rape rate increased by 65% from 9.4 to 15.5 per 100,000 inhabitants.(1) And the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice stated in 1967 that the true rate of total major violent crime was roughly twice as high as the reported rate. In Washington, D.C., Dr. Charles Hayman, Associate Director of Preventive Services in the Public Health Department, has estimated that for every case of rape reported, four are

unreported. His agency was in fact set up following the rape of the wife of a high public official.

Here in Chicago the forcible rape rate is 21.4 per 100,000 population; in Los Angeles it is 45.0; in New Hampshire only 2.7. I must tell you that sexual violence is a special problem in this country, more so than in some others. The United States rape rate is twelve times that of England and Wales, and three times that of Canada. Rape in the U.S.A. is a crime most frequent in large cities, committed by young males from the ghetto slums. It is likely to occur in an indoor location, and to be perpetrated by someone who is a stranger to the victim. The majority of crimes involve blacks attacking blacks, and most of the remainder involve whites victimizing whites.(2)

Sexual violence is a concomitant of war, man's most violent activity. There are frequent reports in the press of sexual attacks on civilian victims by members of the armed forces in Vietnam. One former soldier, James D. Henry, who was in the army in 1967, gave details in a magazine of a night-ambush in which five women were captured by U.S. forces, raped, and then killed. He stated that he also saw a naked Vietnamese girl dragged by soldiers from a hut in which she had been raped, and then, with several other women and children, butchered by the troops.(3) A physician working in Vietnam for the American Friends Service Committee, Dr. Marjorie Nelson, told a sub-committee of the House Committee on Government Operations in July of this year that she had treated the victims of beatings and torture inflicted in a South Vietnamese "Interrogation Center". She examined their injuries, and reported that some of them had told her of being tortured by electricity with wires attached to ears, nipples and genitalia.

In the great majority of acts of sexual violence it is a male who is the aggressor, although some cases of rape of men by women have occurred,[4] and much of the pornographic literature in circulation depicts scenes of fantasy in which women impose on men torture of a sexual nature. And of course there are prostitutes who will provide their clients with bizarre forms of sexual stimulus through the use of whips and other instruments. Such sexual violence, however, seems to reflect more the wishes of the masochistic male than any recognizable sexually sadistic impulse of the female. Acts of violence by women have also been linked to menstrual tension, and one reported study showed a high proportion (62%) of violent crimes committed by women prisoners as occuring in the week before their menstrual period.

It is probably inevitable that some acts of homosexuality will occur in the conditions obtaining in our prisons, just as they occur in single-sex boarding schools. The sexuality of the inmates of either type of institution, whether adolescent or more mature, will inevitably find some outlet of a more active kind than masturbation. We are not concerned here, however, with consenting homosexual acts, but with violence. There is by now ample evidence that sexual violence is a recurrent phenomenon in the prison population of this country. Mr. Alan J. Davis, a Philadelphia lawyer, was recently assigned by Judge Barbieri to investigate conditions in the Philadelphia Prison System, following allegations by two men that they had been sexually assaulted. Mr. Davis' Report[5] made it abundantly clear that sexual assaults in the Philadelphia Prison System are epidemic. Virtually every slightly-built young man committed by the courts, even if only for pre-sentence evaluation, is sexually approached within a day or so after his admission to prison or detention center. Many of these young men are repeatedly "raped" by gangs of inmates , while others, because they have been threatened with such violence, prefer to accept the "protection" of one other prisoner

by entering into an active sexual relationship with him. In addition, once a young man has been successfully assaulted in this way he is marked as a sexual victim for the rest of his stay in prison, even if he moves from one institution to another. It is clear from the Report that many of the prison guards stated that they did not wish to be bothered with complaints of sexual violence, and one guard was alleged to have laughed at a victim after his ordeal; the guard later refused to take a polygraph ("lie-detector") test.

Even those being transported to or from the courts are subjected to attacks -- in the sheriff's vans. Based on fact elicited, frequently from frightened witnesses, Mr. Davis reported that, at a conservative estimate, 2,000 sexual assaults took place in the Philadelphia Prison System during a six-month period in 1968. Only 96 of these assaults were reported to the prison authorities by inmates, and of these only 64 were mentioned in the prison records. Of these 64, only 40 resulted in internal discipline against the aggressors. Out of 129 documented cases, 72 involved Negro aggressors and white victims, 37 Negro aggressors and Negro victims, and 20 white aggressors and white victims. There were no cases involving sexual assault by a white man on a Negro victim.

It is noteworthy that the sexual aggressor in the prison does not consider himself to be a homosexual, and that sexual release is apparently not a prime motive. The Report states that "the primary goal of the sexual aggressor ... is the conquest and degradation of his victim". Most of the aggressors are from a minority group in society whose masculinity has not found expression in raising a family, holding a job or attaining any position of respect or acceptance in normal society. As the writer Jouvenel said "a man feels himself more of a man when he is imposing himself and

making others the instruments of his will".

This state of affairs is by no means confined to the Philadelphia prisons. It occurs in other parts of the prison system, as is clear from feature articles that have appeared in magazines. Charges are made that even some guards are active pederasts. To quote one inmate:

> "Fucking in prison ain't pretty. We're whores in here, whores for the guards, whores for one another ... Once you spread your ass in prison you're a marked woman."(6)

I shall dwell no further on the details of sexual violence in our society, although it would be possible to find other examples in the area of prostitution, in contacts between adults and children, and elsewhere. The deflowering of a virgin girl has frequently been considered as a violent act, and owing to the lack of sexual education of young men in many societies this concept has been all too true in fact. For many girls, their first experience of the sex act has been both painful and frightening, fear and violence taking the place of tenderness and love.

I must, however, say something about the large pornographic market that exists here, for so much of it relies upon the stimulation of those human sadistic and masochistic impulses that are related to sexuality. It is possible to buy paperback books, and no doubt others, describing all manner of sexual depravity in which aggressors force their victims to undergo a multitute of humiliations. That so many shops exist selling this kind of pornography is a clear indication that there is within very many of us a compelling interest in sexual violence. Psychiatrists tell us, as if we did not already know, that men frequently have sexual fantasies in which they behave sadistically. My understanding is that the market for pornography is

greatest in this country, in Great Britain, and in Germany, and we should perhaps reflect on why the Anglo-Saxon culture should manifest such tendencies. A French humorist, Pierre Daninos, once said that "in the depth of every Englishman's sub-conscious there is a cat-of-nine-tails and a school-girl in black stockings".

I recently visited one of the pornography shops, near Grand Central Station in New York City, and bought -- for about twice the price that I normally would pay for a paperback book -- a story entitled Slaves of the Swastika. The shop was being patronized exclusively by people looking rather like me, middle-aged and middle-class, each person studiously avoiding the eyes of the others. This is the same group that visits the sex movies that one can see in almost every large city in this country. The book describes the sexual torture of young women by members of the Gestapo during the Hitler Regime in Nazi Germany, and there is nothing to be gained by recounting its details. Suffice to say that I experienced mixed emotions of distaste, fascination and revulsion during the reading, and that for the day following I was in an angry mood at home, shouting at the children, and at our small and inoffensive dog. It even made me feel guilty to read the book, and I was later reminded of a conclusion I reached some years ago during my marriage counselling work, that guilt is like litmus paper dipped into acid. It turns red within the heart, re-emerging anew as anger.

The violence of the assault by extremist political organizations against programs of sex education has impressed me similarly since I came to live in the United States. I have necessarily been closely involved with the campaign against sex education in general, and SIECUS in particular, since I arrived here, and was at first unbelieving that professional people of the calibre of those on the Board and staff of my small voluntary health agency could conceivably be accused of the sinister motives imputed

to them. Yet accusations have been made, and such books have been published as SIECUS: Corrupter of Youth, and a record entitled "The Child Seducers". Last year, an article appeared in a paper entitled the National Bulletin[7] alleging that after a film had been shown to a sex education class in New York City, students had rioted and raped their teacher. The material of the article is in itself pornographic, in my judgement, in the way it describes the details of the sexual assault. I naturally made careful enquiry about this alleged incident, and can find no record of any kind to indicate that it in fact took place. I spoke personally to the New York Board of Education's representative (Mr. Karp), who said that the article had already come to the Board's attention, that a careful and extensive record was kept by the Department of all untoward incidents in the City's schools, and that there was no mention of any kind of the alleged rape. This in spite of the fact that the article showed pictures of the alleged aggressors and victim, although adding that the latter had refused to press charges against them.

I am not concerned so much to prove these allegations false, but rather to reflect on the attitudes and motives of those who make them. Why is it that some of those who claim they are opposed to sex education express themselves, and act, in so aggressive and violent a way? Why do they urge their supporters to shout and scream at meetings, and stamp their feet? Why do they claim that the would-be sex educators are pornographers, while at the same time using material of the kind I have just described? Why does the thought of human sexuality make them react in so violent a manner?

I am sure we shall be reminded by others at this conference, violence is part of the social currency of our times. As Hannah Arendt recently pointed out, today's young people have "inherited from their parents' generation the experience of a massive intrusion

of criminal violence into politics; they learned in high school about concentration and extermination camps, about genocide and torture..."(8) The awareness of violence is all around us, also the use of force to impose man's will upon man, individually or in groups. Arendt, in her thoughtful and scholarly work, distinguishes carefully between force, used as a synonym for violence, and authority. It is only when authority breaks down, she says, that violence becomes relevant, and instances the use of violent means by the authorities of Berkely University to break the power of the students. Power and violence, she says, "are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent". This is of course also true for the purpose of my theme: where there is consent to a sexual act, violence is irrelevant. I am reminded of a small cartoon appearing recently in a British paper, in which a man creeps up as if to attack a woman. Spying him, she willingly takes off her clothes--at which he runs off to fetch a policeman!

Sexual violence, then, is symptomatic of a lack of sexual power, not a sign of its possession. The rapist is the man who feels the inadequacy of his own sexuality, as does the reader of sadistic literature. It is from our fears of inadequacy, our knowledge that we patently lack power, that our sexual violence springs.

This argument I find much more compelling that the engaging examples given by Konrad Lorenz of the ways in which geese mate and small colored fish defend their territories, as indications that animals have a built-in aggressiveness. Certainly there is a strong element of the use of physical strength in human sexual activity, and this may well be linked with the instinctive need to preserve the species, but I would not think that there is any valid parallel to be drawn between man and animals in the area of sexuality and violence.

Passion in love-making, it seems to me, expresses the mutual power that a man and a woman in love have over one another. The consent of each of them to the use of what we might in some cases term "brute force", and to the infliction of pain, is all part of the fascinating spectrum of the art of love-making. Few men, I believe, would resort to sexual violence in any form if their own sexuality was boisterously expressed in bed at home. I do not refer here, of course, to the deviant behavior of those who express themselves sexually in sado-masochistic ways, but rather to the uninhibited physical expression of sexual passion in the enduring and loving relationship of a man and a woman. What man has not dwelt upon his skill as a lover, what girl has not dreamt of being swept away by the all-compelling ardor of masculinity? And have not many couples learned to use and direct their sexual zest, the man "taking" his woman, grasping her in his love and passion, while she buries her mouth, her teeth, into his neck, and draws her nails across his back? And all this culminating in orgasm and resolving itself in serene relaxation.

Lorenz says "I believe ... that present-day civilized man suffers from insufficient discharge of his aggressive drive".(9) I am not sure this is right, and again much prefer Arendt's conclusion that "the present glorification of violence is caused by severe frustration of the faculty of action in the modern world".(8) I think it is not so much the expression of an aggressive drive that we see manifested in sexual violence, as a feeling of sexual inadequacy, especially in the male.

The narrow boundaries of our unique and personal inner world are being forced inward. The social and commercial pressures of society leave us less room to act as distinct and separate individuals.

This is the era of cubic existence. We live in boxes. Placed at birth in hygienic cradles, growing up in prefabricated houses and apartments, travelling about in crates on wheels, we hasten onward until, unable to make any further contribution to the gross national product, we are committed to the boxes of senior citizens' city, the hospital ward, and eventually to a one-way wooden box marked "Exit Only".

Being, thank God, human, we rebel. In the only area yet left to most of us, the area of relationships and of human emotions, we refuse to become cube-creatures and insist on some form of personal freedom. It is not only the young who are rejecting the restrictive bonds of this overcrowded society, it is our middle-aged selves. This explains to some extent the increase in actual sexual violence that I have mentioned, but also the much greater interest in such violence -- and in sexual behavior generally. The briefest glance through the entertainment pages of the newspapers shows that we are today being offered a great number and variety of films and plays displaying the most intimate details of human sexual behavior. You will have gathered that I think that the effective, athletic yet responsible use of our own sexual drives might reduce our often prurient interest in such second-hand means of entertainment.

I may, of course, be quite wrong about all this. Freud himself said that "the sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness -- a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. Thus, sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated, and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position".[11] With the exception of certain rodents, he says, no other vertebrate habitually destroys members of its own species.

This is true, but I suggest that the violence that we see expressed in a sexual way is not so much the spontaneous explosion of a force that builds up steadily within us, as a reaction to unnatural restraint. To quote Rene Dubos: "Even in the urban city dweller the Paleolithic bull survives and paws the earth whenever a threatening gesture is made on the social scene".(12) The very act of driving on crowded thruways, jostling with hefty neighbors on the subway, and struggling with complex machinery that goes wrong, is far more frustrating than the natural, and at least understandable, limitations on our success in hewing wood, drawing water and ploughing the fields. Clara Thompson, an analyst working in this country, says that aggression is not necessarily destructive. "It springs" she says, "from an innate tendency to grow and master life which seems to be characteristic of all living matter. Only when this life force is obstructed in its development do ingredients of anger, rage, or hate become connected with it".(13)

Let us consider those stock characters, the cave-woman and the henpecked husband. The former, dragged happily along the ground by a hairy man with a club in his hand, is clearly more satisfied with her lot than the mild, be-spectacled gentleman peering anxiously up at his massive wife who is towering above him with rolled sleeves and a grim expression on her face. From these images we gather that the dominant male is generally assumed to be acting as he should, while the man who is himself dominated is the object of derision and scorn. It is odd to reflect, then, that the TV cartoon-strip "The Flintstones", portraying the very cave-men and women on whom we have depended for role-identification, shows the female of the species as the bright and dominant character, and the male as a dumb but willing clod.

More in tune with theme of sexual violence has been the most famous cartoon situation of all, the desert island onto which have been cast an ill-clad but buxom young female and a man who obviously sees himself (as does the male reader) in a position of advantage. The lightly-veiled implication in this situation is that the man is sooner or later likely to have his sexual way with the girl. Similar overtones appear in the Victorian melodramas in which the villian, twirling his moustache, whispers aside to the audience that the heroine is "in his power". These images are now only a small part of the sexual fare offered to the public, but they have expressed an interest in sexual subjugation that lies within us. We have come far from the days of the cartoon and the self-mocking melodrama when sexual violence is now literally portrayed in the magazines, newspapers and television sets in our own homes.

The capacity to express violence in sexual terms is not exclusive to the male. This is apparent from some elements of the Women's Liberation Movement. Although it is sometimes hard to distinguish motive amid the expletives, I think there is a good deal of violent sexual expression in this movement. Writing in a recent book with the strange title I, B.I.T.C.H., Caroline Hennessey says:

> "Any woman can castrate any million men in any of a million ways. Just walk seductively, BITCH, and carry a big gelding knife". (14)

Making due allowance for poetic license, and for a vein of hysteria that runs through her book, Miss Hennessey is nevertheless expressing vividly her own, and many women's, violent resentment of the dominant role that the male has assumed in society. And this violent means of expression is emerging at a time when

society at large is turning to force as a way of expressing, or repressing, dissent and discontent with the existing order of things.

Before leaving consideration of the causes of violent sexual behavior, we should take some note of current research into the biological element. Dr. Shab of the Center for the Study of Crime and Delinquency at the National Institute of Mental Health was recently reported as saying that biological causes of violence are as important as psychological and social ones.(15) There have been some instances of links between irregularities in sex chromosomes and the commision of violent crime, and indications that these irregularities may make some people especially vulnerable to social pressures that others can resist. This research continues, and those of us whose background is mainly in the behavioral sciences must be aware of its findings.

What is to be done? How can we so direct our sexuality that it becomes a more creative than a destructive force? I believe that continual exposure to violence generally, and to sexual violence in particular, is as dangerous to the fabric of our society as is the free availability of hard drugs. The use of force consumes men, its victims physically, and its practitioners and observers mentally, by habituating them to violence. Just as our age-long efforts to control our environment are now becoming disastrously successful, so we are doing damage to our internal ecology by exposing ourselves so frequently to violence. Yet attempts to repress violence by violent means have long proved to be self-defeating. Man, in his new restricted environment, will need to learn ways to exercise restraint in the use of his sexuality.

Lorenz says that the aggressive instinct can be allowed outlet through the safety valve of sport. Sport, he says, "educates man to a conscious and responsible control

of his own fighting behavior". Yes, it does. It also gives him a chance to exercise his emotional muscles without going nearer to a sporting event than the TV set in his own living room. I have seen the city of Manhattan turn from its usual aggressive path to joy and rapture by the triumph of the Mets; I have seen hordes of happy West Indians pour onto a cricket pitch in London, waving, shouting and gesticulating as their team vanquished the English side; I have seen a full stadium of people in Dublin erupt from suspense to frabjous joy when a small bay horse carried its rider faultlessly over perilous banks and chasms; I have measured my own heartbeats as a stooping man stroked a small white ball across close-cut grass into a little muddy hole.

But can we honestly look at these examples and really expect an increase in sporting activity to have any measurable effect on violence in our society? I think not, and for the reason that I stated before: it is life in the straitjacket of our times, and the narrowing of the area in which we can each exercise an independent existence, that makes us violent. For many of us, it is in our personal relationships and our sexual life that we seek means by which to escape this straitjacket.

We therefore need to make conscious efforts to adjust to our changing circumstances, and to avoid the stimuli which tend to arouse sexual aggression. Much has been said about the evils of censorship. In a democracy we abhor the inroads that are made upon personal freedom. But in this society I think we have unwisely permitted a total commercial invasion of sexual privacy to the point at which we are continually re-opening our own wounds. However, I do not think that suppression will work, nor do I advocate the re-institution of harsh censorship laws. This would merely drive pornography underground. And although the abolition of laws against the sale of

pornography may have successfully been carried through in Denmark, I think that the Anglo-Saxon societies are sufficiently different for this medicine to be ineffective here.

It has also been suggested that we should allow pornography to remain available, but made much more expensive. It is said that if a tax were levied upon films that achieve an "X" rating, and upon published material in the same category, the present trend would be reversed. If it cost, say, $25.00 to see an "X" film, and the same to buy a paperbook like Slaves of the Swastika, would this help us to introduce an element of self-restraint? Or should pornography be available, as is liquor in some states, from specially licensed shops?

I think not. Such measures are likely only to drive pornography further underground. It seems to me that only comprehensive sex education is likely to have any lasting effect. One object of such education must be to provide people with a shield against the assault on their sexual privacy. Education for human sexuality would deflate, not increase, the market for the pornography. To give straightforward information about sex is quite as important, indeed more important, than about other human functions. More important, because our sexuality is so constantly involved with our emotions, whereas our appetite for food, at least in this affluent age, is much less so. Furthermore, ignorance is no basis on which to expect the growing generation, or the middle-aged, to reach responsible decisions on personal behavior, especially sexual behavior, nor to reject the lure of the pornographic market. This is what sex education is all about. By offering it we enable people to make informed choices about the way they will act sexually. Instead of relying for their knowledge about

human sexuality on dirty jokes, inaccurate information from their peers, graffiti on the walls of public buildings, and pornographic paperbacks and films they can see themselves as sexual beings without any sense of shame.

It has been this feeling of shame, I think, that has so inhibited our society from developing sexual sanity. From the days when ladies placed trousers round the legs of their tables to the present, when their modern counterparts see sex education as a Communist plot, the association of guilt and secrecy with sexuality has actually fostered interest in the sexually bizarre. To correct this imbalance we need to offer education for human sexuality to our whole society. We must naturally start with the professional elements, for it is they who can influence the attitudes and behavior of the pupils, clients and patients for whom they are responsible. For example, there is a need for sex education of law enforcement officers, of the police and of prison officials.

There is just as great a need for sex education in the schools. A research project undertaken between 1952 and 1955 found that, of a group of sex offenders, 91.2% had recieved no structured sex education of any kind.(16) The report stated that it had been demonstrated "that the individual who commits a sexual offense is emotionally disturbed, frequently seriously so ... The tremendous amount of confusion, distortion, ignorance and anxiety that was shown by these men in the areas of sexual development would indicate that there is a need for a much improved program of sexual education, particularly during childhood".

Over the whole period of his development of which we are aware, man has achieved balance in his life through acquiring knowledge about himself, leading to understanding

and the capacity to control his behavior. This is the message brought to us by the great religions of the past and present, by the guru and the behavioral scientist, by the analyst, the prophet, the minister and the teacher. Yet we persistently ignore this message in relation to our own sexuality, the greatest of our life forces.

If we can somehow bring ourselves to face, comprehend, and then accept our sexuality, then I am certain that we would have no need for the "X" movie and the sado-masochistic paperback. This we can achieve through education. I believe that we could learn to exercise our sexuality with zest but with responsibility, and could reduce the violent expression of sex until it becomes only the phenomenon of a sick personality, rather than the symptom of a sick society.

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